

Strategic Planning Task Force  
Report to Session  
December 5, 2014

### **Process Summary:**

The Strategic Planning Task Force has completed our study of Central Presbyterian Church's history and present circumstances, and gathered the congregation's thoughts on what things are most important over the next 5 years. We worked with the Rev. Sarai Rice (both via correspondence and in person) to gain perspective on the issues impacting the wider church and on the dynamics of our particular congregation.

Most recently, the task force surveyed the congregation for four consecutive weeks asking one question per week:

- Describe a time when you saw Central Presbyterian Church at its best.
- What brought you to Central Presbyterian? What keeps you here?
- What would you like to see Central Presbyterian accomplish in the next five years?
- What new church emphasis would make you so excited that you would tell others enthusiastically?

Respondents were invited to answer online, by mail, by filling out a bulletin insert on Sunday mornings or through individual discussions with task force members. Additionally, we made contact with the youth and with a randomly selected sample of congregants to allow longer conversations. We met with Rev. Rice on Saturday, November 15th to review and discuss the congregational responses and to formulate a recommendation to the session.

### **Survey Summary:**

The 4 questions each drew a good response--well more than required for a statistically valid sample. Because the questions were open-ended, the answers had a wide range. Some general trends developed in each, however, and are listed below:

#### **Central Presbyterian at its best:**

- Worship or elements of worship, e.g. sermons, music, special services for Easter and Christmas;
- External Mission, with specific mention the Chironna Day Nursery School, youth mission trips, and the adult mission trip to Buckhorn, KY and a general notion of being involved in the community;
- Pastoral care, including care to members provided directly by the pastor, through the Board of Deacons, or by individual members of the church.
- Fellowship, somewhat focused on the fellowship hour following worship, but also a widespread feeling of connectedness and graciousness among members.

#### **Brought me/us here? And I/we stay because:**

- Sense of Community—This was the largest response. Over half mentioned a feeling of community, and a strong sense of feeling nurtured by the whole congregation.
- Sermons—Just under half mentioned thoughtful sermons, often with specific reference to Lant Davis, John Chironna or both.
- Denominational Affiliation—about one fourth were specifically looking for a Presbyterian congregation.
- Feeling Welcomed—Many mentioned being warmly welcomed on the first visit, a strong children’s program and excellent music were also reported.

#### Accomplish in the next 5 years

- External Mission—nearly two thirds expressed a desire for increasing the church’s role in external mission.
- Increased Membership/Increased Involvement—many expressed a hope that the congregation would continue to grow. There were also mentions of hope that current members would take on more roles and duties in the church.
- Sanctuary Renovation—there was significant mention of proceeding with the renovations to the sanctuary and building maintenance.

#### Exciting new church emphasis

This question garnered the fewest responses with about two thirds the response rate of the other three questions.

- External Mission—just under half expressed a desire for additional external mission projects.
- No change—about one fourth felt we should keep on doing what we are currently doing.
- A detailed proposal was attached for developing an early childhood math skills mission.

#### In-depth interviews

Seventeen follow up interviews were conducted, some brief via email for out of town members and others longer over coffee or lunch. There were strong echoes of the comments from the survey. Some, in fact, commented that they had already given detailed responses previously. Lant Davis’s leadership, both from the pulpit and in guiding the direction of the church was mentioned frequently. Likewise, the feeling of fellowship and connectedness was repeated, although one comment noted “cliquishness.” New or increased external mission was mentioned often, and with specific direction toward youth or education. [Note: During the time that the interviews were being conducted, there was some confusion about the proposed sculpture, particularly its funding, and we received objections to having the church budget diverted away from mission toward such a project. Interviewers attempted to clarify misconceptions on that issue.]

## **Considerations and Deliberations**

During its meeting with Rev. Rice on November 15<sup>th</sup>, the task force drew on the collected surveys and conversations to categorize responses under these headings: Assets and Attributes; Challenges; Context (where the church finds itself within the community); Story Lines (the things that seem to define us); and Purpose of the Church.

Three things became clear during those discussions:

- We have, as a congregation, a strong desire to increase our external mission activity; and
- We are operating near the limit of volunteer time that many members are able to devote to the work of the church; and
- We very much enjoy how the church is currently functioning.

From that, we compiled a list of goals that were consonant with the characteristics above and selected the recommendation we now bring from that list.

## **Task Force Recommendations:**

The task force recommends the following:

1. We need to maintain the strength and great traditions we already have including:
  - a. Love of learning
  - b. Taking care of each other
  - c. Being a close “family” that acts to help others (“family of action”)
  - d. Our current mission commitments, special events, and worship
  - e. The joint youth program
2. We should adopt “education” as an emerging mission focus, exploring a variety of activities involving:
  - a. Early childhood education
  - b. Primary and secondary education
  - c. Post-secondary education
  - d. International outreach (HEME fund, international students in our community)
3. Many members as well as our current staff lack the time to achieve increased external mission while maintaining our current work and programs. Because of this, extra staff will be required to expand mission. We recommend hiring a part-time employee whose job description might include coordinating external mission opportunities for both individuals and the congregation as a whole, grant writing, community engagement, strengthening the connection to local colleges in some way, and coordinating members’ internal volunteer opportunities (e.g., recruiting people for worship assistant and other routine congregational tasks.)

4. Following our intentional decision to stay in this historic location, the church should proceed with plans for the next stage of the church remodeling.
5. The session should identify next steps, including timeline and budget, for the additional mission and supporting staff, and for completing sanctuary work and deferred maintenance.